

The SKELETON FINGER

by Headdon Hall



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BEGIN HERE TODAY

SIR DUDLEY GLENISTER, accused of the murder of his cousin, George Glenister, is felled in his attempt to destroy his enemy, Norman Slater, kept prisoner with his sweetheart, Kathleen Glenister, in an old mill, while—

JAMES WRAGGE, Scotland Yard detective assigned to the case, and Stephen Colne, interested in fastening the crime on Sir Dudley, spoil the filming of a picture of the burning old mill, which results in fatal injuries to—

"MISS MAUD BLAIR," who on her death bed accuses Stephen Colne, former cabinet minister, of the murder of George Glenister. NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY "A fat lot I care about that," rejoined "Miss Blair." "I only want to square accounts with a black-guard. And now you run away and play, little boy," she added. "With any luck you may be in time to see Sir Dudley's burning mill. I expect the loony and his fire expert are about somewhere."

With which she faints. John Grimes had been chafing her hands, but he dropped them and stood upright. "His features were convulsed with horror. "Fire at the mill house?" he murmured dully. "Do you know what she means?" He turned fiercely on his wife.

But Mrs. Grimes shook her head. "But Mrs. Grimes shook her grizzled head and mouthed a denial. "That man-monkey shall tell me," cried the keeper, and he strode from the cottage, followed by Wrage, who unobtrusively attached himself to Mr. Colne again. "May God forgive me!" groaned the keeper with sincerity. "I thought I was serving the family—not a fiend. He has got his cousin and her sweetheart shut up there!" The deluded worshiper of the

Glenister tradition started to run across the clearing, with Womersley's troupe at his heels giving tongue like a pack of badly broken hounds on a false scent. In the turmoil caused by the accident to the leading lady the electrician had omitted to switch off the light, and the mill stood stark and silent, a ghost-haunted memory of other days, in the artificial glow. Wrage glanced at it and decided that the stalwart gamekeeper was competent to deal with a situation that had not yet arisen. Just now his duty lay nearer to hand—the hand that had once more taken quiet possession of the cabinet minister's arm.

He looked sideways at the refined and clever face that was almost cheek-by-jowl with his own. It was all sagged and drawn into unaccustomed lines that indicated tremendous emotion—emotion suggesting a well-high overwhelming dread under a control strained to snapping point.

Yet Wrage had looked on that face and quailed before it at intervals during the worst moments of his life. He would have been less than human if a note of triumph had not crept into his voice. "Mr. Colne," he said, "I am under the disadvantage of holding no warrant, but I will take the responsibility of arresting you on suspicion of the murder of Mr. George Glenister on the 7th of June, 1919."

For a few seconds Mr. Colne did not answer. He seemed to be intent on watching the progress of the stepping-stones. He had almost reached the stepping-stones. The keeper had chosen that route to the mill as the shortest from the cottage, overlooking the fact that it would take more time to traverse than that across the top of the dam. The stepping-stones were in darkness, whereas the dam was in the full glare of Mr. Womersley's electric projector.

"Then a short gasp broke from him, to be echoed in a deeper exclamation from the detective. Preoccupied as they both were, the same thing had intruded on their senses and distracted their attention simultaneously. Away beyond the mill-race another light had broken out which was not the steady glow of the Amphylian electric. Red flames were shooting from the door of the mill-house, licking tongues of fire struggling with a belching cloud of smoke.

John Grimes and his motley following had vanished in the darkness that enshrouded the stepping-stones, but a mighty roar from the keeper's lungs proclaimed that he knew he was too late. Wrage's grip may have relaxed owing to the diversion. Be that as it may, Mr. Colne wrenched himself free and, for a man of his years, with amazing swiftness toward the dam.

When he had covered some twenty yards he halted and called back: "There are lives to be saved. I shall do my best." The mill was ablaze, and in the wind-blend of smoke and fire round the door human figures were moving wildly, as in some fantastic dance. Wrage could not distinguish one from the other as he trod the slippery masonry, and the Right Honorable Stephen Colne had vanished into the heart of the elusive picture.

CHAPTER XXVII "Sheep and Goats" ALF GRIMSTEAD was met on the threshold of the upper room by Norman and Kathleen when he returned from his reconnaissance on the landing.

So rapidly did they bear her down the stairs that the deep breath she drew on starting lasted her as long as she had to endure the smoke that rolled up the well of the staircase, and the rush across the blazing entry was accomplished with no greater damage than a scorched shawl. As they passed through the outer door onto the bank of the mill-race they were met by John Grimes, gesticulating like a madman.

"Thank God!" he bellowed, recognizing Norman and Kathleen as they tore off their protective bandages. "Anyone left inside?"

"Sir Dudley is lying in the entry," replied Norman. "I kicked against some one on the floor, and it couldn't have been anyone else."

The gamekeeper plunged into the furnace and was out again almost as soon as they realized his intention. His hair and eyebrows were on fire, but he extinguished them with an impatient gesture as soon as his hands were free of his load. For in his arms he carried the bar-

THE GREAT AMERICAN HOME



SNAPSHOT OF THE MAN WHO HAS TO LISTEN TO THIS ALL DAY LONG AT THE OFFICE

Womersley's electric projector.

The great statesman had the silver tones of his beautiful voice well under control when at last he broke the silence.

"What of yourself, Wrage?" he said quietly. "Have you counted the cost of the action you are proposing to take? The records of your early lapse from the straight path are still in being, remember."

"I have not forgotten, sir," replied the inspector gravely. Then he laughed a little and added: "There being no witnesses present, I do not mind confessing that I am hoping for great things from those records now that I have completed my case against you. The authorities will hold it to my credit that I have arrested a highly placed criminal in spite of the fact that I had this pull over me. My lapse, as you call it, was a mere trifle compared with yours, Mr. Colne, and I have atoned for it by years of faithful service to the state."

"I see," sneered the cabinet minister. "You finked my pull over you till you obtained a greater one over me. What a homily I should be able to deliver to Parliament on the moral rectitude of the police force! But see here, Wrage, as man to man, if you really intend to brave the perils of your past, will ten thousand pounds and the chief constabulary of a county induce you to abandon the idea?"

"Not on your life, sir. I have too many ignominious years of being bullied and browbeaten by you to wipe out," responded Wrage.

Mr. Colne sighed as one who deplores the folly of a feebler mind.

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onet of Beechwood Grange, as limp and helpless as a sack of potatoes and horribly burned in addition to the injuries inflicted by Alf. Mercifully he had lost all consciousness.

Grimes laid him tenderly down on the bank and was beginning to shout orders to the Womersley crew to run for the doctor, when from the dam there came with a rush the Right Honorable Stephen Colne. He was out of breath and no one was surprised when he came to a standstill. The piercing eyes which had so often held the House in thrall were shining like those of a mystic who sees beyond the veil. He raised his right hand.

(To Be Continued)

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Brashears and family, of Redondo Beach, spent Sunday at the home of Mrs. Brashears' sister, Mrs. T. J. Tonkin, of Beacon street.

M. Waddell of Redondo Beach was entertained at luncheon Sunday by Mr. and Mrs. H. G. Randles of Pennsylvania avenue.

Mrs. Paul Mading of Pennsylvania avenue spent the weekend at the home of her sister, Mrs. Carl Bertin, of Los Angeles.

The H. H. Halladay family is improving, after a week's illness.

Guests Sunday of Mrs. Edna Schmidt of Pennsylvania avenue were Miss Ruby Thomas and Miss Opal Edwards, of Weston street.

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***** LOMITA NOTES ***** Mrs. Leroy Cox of Redondo boulevard spent Friday with her sister, Mrs. A. G. Pruitt, of Long Beach. Mr. and Mrs. Clay Johnson of Whittier were recent guests of Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Johnson of Cypress street. Mr. and Mrs. F. B. Willis spent Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. Robert Willis of Long Beach. Mrs. Charles Franke of Pennsylvania avenue has recovered from an attack of influenza. Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Meers of Walnut street were entertained Friday by Mr. and Mrs. D. H. Burden of Compton. Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Buford of 257th street were weekend visitors at Laguna Beach. Mrs. H. L. Johnson and daughter Melva and Mrs. Neutebaum Sr. were San Pedro visitors Saturday. Mrs. O. H. Burnett of Redondo boulevard accompanied Mr. and Mrs. E. B. Smith and a party of San Pedro friends Sunday on a visit to the Resolute, the largest passenger steamer afloat. Mrs. Jeanette Crane of Long Beach and Mrs. A. G. Bartlett of Watsonville were guests Thursday of Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Crane of Narbonne avenue. Mr. and Mrs. C. D. Kette of Oak street and Mrs. George Miller of Redondo boulevard spent Sunday in Los Angeles. Jimmy Pratt of Venice spent Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. Charles Ganster of Redondo boulevard. Mrs. Albert Prince of 260th street is reported ill. Paul Atherton of Redondo boulevard spent Saturday in San Pedro.

James Williams and Mr. Perkins, of Culver City, were recent visitors at the home of Mrs. Williams' cousins, Mr. and Mrs. H. G. Randles, of Pennsylvania avenue.

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